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C O N F I D E N T I A L MINSK 000679

SIPDIS

G/IWI FOR C. PONTICELLI AND G. CAVIN  
SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREF](#) [KWMN](#) [SCUL](#) [BO](#)  
SUBJECT: ACTIVIST SEEKS TO EXPAND ROLE OF WOMEN IN BELARUS  
BEFORE 2007 LOCAL ELECTIONS

REF: MINSK 536

Classified By: Ambassador Krol for Reasons 1.4 (B and D)

¶1. (C) Summary: In her new role as head of the Commission on Women in the United Civic Party (UCP), Women's Independent Democratic Movement (WIDM) chair Lyudmila Petina told DCM she is searching for ways to encourage women to become more politically active, including the possible creation of a women's wing of the UCP. According to Petina, WIDM is already taking steps to prepare women voters and candidates for the 2007 local elections despite the intense pressure the organization faces from the GOB. Looking back at the role women played in the 2006 presidential elections, Petina proposed to DCM that WIDM and Post co-host an event for the release of WIDM's latest bulletin which highlights the experiences of women activists during the March presidential elections. Petina recounted for DCM her positive experience at the Global Summit of Women in Cairo and discussed her desire to secure a place on the agenda for Belarus at next year's summit in Germany. End Summary.

Petina's Pushes to Increase the Role of Women in UCP

¶2. (C) At a meeting on June 21, Women's Independent Democratic Movement (WIDM) chair Lyudmila Petina told DCM and Poloff that she wants to revive the women's party and encourage women to become more politically active. At the recent internal United Civic Party (UCP) elections where Petina was elected as the head of the UCP's Commission on Women, Petina proposed the establishment of a women's wing of the UCP. She complained to DCM about the lack of ideas and structure of the women's party "Hope" under Valentina Matushevich and Matushevich's lackluster efforts to promote women's issues as Ten Plus Coalition political council member. In contrast, Petina praised the efforts of the young women leader from Vitebsk, Kristina Shatikova, who was recently fined USD 2,168 for staging an unauthorized protest after she hung a red and white nationalist flag from a television tower. Petina noted the importance of strengthening contacts between up and coming and established women leaders in further involving women in Belarus' political life.

WIDM Prepares for Local Elections

¶3. (C) According to Petina, WIDM has already planned projects

to prepare women leaders and voters for the 2007 local elections. Under the second tranche of her NDI grant, Petina's organization will organize seminars in the regional capitals for voter awareness campaigns in July before providing a more detailed training for women in the fall. Petina commented that she has established good contacts with women farmers who appear to be potential allies for the opposition during the local elections, given that many of them are experiencing a number of problems with the city councils. She emphasized, as she had done in the May meeting with DCM (reftel), the importance of non-political themes for the seminars, such as health and unemployment, which are key issues for women.

#### Embassy to Host WIDM Election Bulletin Release

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¶4. (C) Petina informed DCM that WIDM's bulletin highlighting the experiences of women leading up to, during, and following the March 2006 presidential elections is almost completed. Petina proposed to DCM that WIDM and Post co-host an event for the release of this bulletin, which recounts the experiences of women activists in the October Square tent city and in prison. Election heroines during the elections, young women leaders and those featured in the bulletin would be invited. Post agreed to co-host this event with Petina in the Public Affairs Section building.

#### WIDM Experiences More GOB Harassment

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¶5. (C) According to Petina, WIDM continues to experience harassment from the authorities. Petina said that she was called into the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) to speak with Chief Specialist of the NGO Department Alexandr Khariton. (Note: During her May meeting with DCM, Petina said she received a letter from the MOJ accusing her of being involved in unsanctioned political activities.) Petina said that she believes that the GOB authorities are preparing an official warning for WIDM and restated her fears that the organization may be closed. While she stressed the importance of remaining a legally registered organization, Petina told DCM that the organization is prepared to continue working underground even if it is officially closed.

#### Petina Prepares for Next Global Women's Summit

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¶6. (C) Petina stressed that she was very pleased with the contacts she made at the Global Summit of Women conference held in Cairo in June, particularly the contacts with European women leaders. (Note: Prompted by the Department's Office of Women's Issues, Post proposed to Petina participation in the Summit and located funding to cover the cost of the conference (reftel).) Petina added that the IRI representative at the conference sought her out to discuss future projects.

¶7. (C) According to Petina, next year's Global Summit of Women conference will be held in Berlin. Given Belarus' close proximity to Germany, Petina hopes more Belarusian women will be able to participate in the conference. In Cairo, Petina lobbied for next year's conference to include segments on Belarus and the role of women and NGO's in the FSU. Petina noted that she has many contacts in Germany and could coordinate with them to create a presentation on these themes for the summit.

#### Comment

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¶8. (C) Petina's participation in the Global Women's Summit succeeded in exposing the Belarus situation to the international community and facilitating contacts between Belarusian women activists and influential global women leaders. Petina is organized and clearly driven to promote women's involvement in politics and democratic change in

Belarus. As a result, WIDM is one of the few organizations in Belarus that is already focused on preparations for the upcoming local elections.

Krol